

“Hello, My Name Is.....”

By: Danny Siegel

Their mistake was trifling, really.
It was the Forties and the Fifties
and my parents couldn't have foreseen my Jewish pride rising
like a perfect sun on a perfect Summer's day,
nor would they have had reason to feel the surge ahead of its time
as Israel grew up year by year, no longer a runt to be pushed around,
and balanced on its feet rather like a karate expert,
all firm and ready for all comers
who kept chanting their taunts about pushing the Jews into the sea,
while yet the ultimate host as they brought the people home
from Morocco and Turkey and Yemen
and singles and couples and children
from a Europe that for Jews resembled a torn and bloody Tallis,
the blue and while of its Tzitzit
transferred to the new flag, with a star.

My parents were still recovering from The Tales of the War
and trying to find out about relatives
and learning new terms like “DP”
and absorbing day by agony-filled day
the chaos and devastation of the death camps,
all of which is why, until my Bar Mitzvah,
I was no more than “Danny”.

Because of my old name,
I had to fend for myself alone,
just me, myself, a mere “Danny”.
Then, in the magical and radical year 5717,
I was called to the Torah, “son of....”
I was linked. I was tied.
I was whatever metaphor put me in line directly with Abraham and Sarah,
and I began to sign my name, even on school reports, in Hebrew,
“ben” comfortably in place in the middle of each phrase.

I picked through all the family documents,
the letters from Europe, the birth and death certificates,
the passenger lists from the boats and the papers for citizenship,
until I got the lineage right three generations back
so when people asked who I was, I could say, at least,

Ya'acov Yehudah (of Virginia)
ben Yitzchak Zelig (of New Jersey)
ben Ze'ev David VeTzirel Dvora (of Poland and America)
ben Usher Zelig VeSarah Golda (of the photograph,
of Poland, which was Russia in their day)
HaLevi (of ancient Israel),
and on my Mother's side:
ben Yehudit (also of New Jersey)
bat Shmuel V'Channah of New York and the neighborhood of Minsk,
even one more, then two more, generations back,
and making a point to rattle them all off at the least invitation
to make myself understood, as in,
"Hello, my name is..."

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...., what's yours?"

And I was never alone again.